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## The Rules for Bibliographic Information and the Standards for MARC

**O**ver the years, experts in the field of cataloging have come to the conclusion that it would be a good thing if all libraries everywhere would provide the same bibliographic information about the same materials. These experts have, with much squabbling, developed some comprehensive rules about precisely what elements this bibliographic information should contain, and how we can achieve consistency in providing that information.

These rules have changed (and continue to change) over time, and not every library follows the same rules worldwide. The current, nationally accepted **cataloging rules** for the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and most other English-speaking countries are called the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, or **AACR2**. These cataloging rules tell the cataloger how to describe and provide consistent search terms for the materials in our library collections (AACR 1998, 1).

The cataloging rules are amazingly comprehensive and contain such minute details as

where to look on an item for the data that we can use to describe that item (e.g., do we take the title from the **title page** or from the dust jacket?)

how to be consistent in our search terms (e.g., do we use Muhammad Ali or Cassius Clay as a **heading** for the boxer?)

the punctuation that we are to use between different elements in the description

Using the cataloging rules, we know how to describe library holdings, but AACR2 isn't enough to get these descriptions into the online catalogs of today—for that we need MARC.

The official documentation describes MARC as “a carrier for bibliographic information” (*MARC21 Concise* 1999, introd.). It further states that this “MARC format is a standard for the representation and exchange of bibliographic data in machine-readable form.” You need to understand that MARC does *not* tell us *how* to describe library materials; AACR2 does that. MARC, on the other hand, is the standard that has been developed for coding our bibliographic information into a computer record. To put it another way, MARC provides a vehicle for us to communicate bibliographic data electronically between libraries, and AACR2 provides the universally agreed-upon rules for the content of the MARC records (Gorman 2001). In short, MARC is a standard for entering bibliographic information into a computer record.

We have established that there are two separate sets of rules, or standards, involved in bibliographic information: one for describing library materials (AACR2), and one for representing these descriptions in our online catalogs (MARC).

With this in mind we are going to take a quick look at some of the most basic rules for providing bibliographic information.

The cataloging rules (AACR2) say that first we are to describe the material. Think about these six **areas of information**:

1. Title and statement of responsibility
2. Edition
3. Publication details
4. Physical description of the material
5. Series
6. Notes

This is called **bibliographic description**.

Why do we need so much detail? Although it is true that at the most basic level, many of our patrons won’t care about more than an author and a title, others just might need more details, such as:

Large print? This is important in a place like Florida.

Illustrations? Someone might need a picture of a lion, so we say whether a book is illustrated.

Illustrated by whom? Maybe someone needs the Dickens with the illustrations by Boz, and we had better not present her with the edition without illustrations, or with different illustrations. She needs that particular edition, and we need to be sure that if we say we have it, we really do have it and not some other “close enough” edition.

The following questions illustrate other possibly useful information:

I’m doing a book report—how many pages does this book have?

Which edition is it? First? Second? Fifty-second?

Are there any bibliographies to help me find other stuff on this subject?

So we describe the material, as accurately as possible and in detail, because these days many of our patrons will be looking at these descriptions via computers. Some of our patrons may be homebound while others might be just too busy to make it to the library. Some of our patrons are interlibrary loan (ILL) patrons, and they could be thousands of miles away for all we know. Although it

is wonderful that we can now allow patrons to search our collections from their computers at their convenience, this definitely increases our responsibility to make sure that our electronic descriptions truly represent the items in our collections. We certainly do not want to send the patron who is thousands of miles away something other than what we say we have.

It is imperative, therefore, that wherever our patrons may be, they can tell from our descriptions whether we have exactly what they are looking for. That is why we make our descriptions detailed and accurate: *so that our patrons can tell from the computer screen whether we really have what they want.*

One more reason for us to provide accurate descriptions is so that other catalogers can tell from our records whether they have the same items that we do. We will say more about this when we get to the concept of **copy cataloging**.

The cataloging rules (AACR2) then say to provide searchable terms, such as:

1. Author
2. Title
3. **Series**
4. **Added entries**, such as editors, related authors, related titles, etc.

These are called headings or **access points**.

We turn to AACR2 for instructions on when to provide the preceding four types of headings and how to be consistent in what we use for those headings.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what to call someone or something. Is he "John J. Smith" or "John James Smith"? Is it the "14th International Conference on AIDS" or the "14th International AIDS Conference"? It makes a difference. Do I call this thing a "bomb" or an "incendiary device"? Once we decide on a name for a heading, it's best to stick to that name. This is called making an **established heading**, and it is a key ingredient in our effort toward achieving bibliographic control.<sup>1</sup>

Try to imagine searching a multiplicity of library **databases** without this consistency, this control. It would be just like the Web, with everybody calling the same things by different names! But in libraries, we have always felt the need to organize information. Established headings are one way in which we provide this organization. It takes work, of course, but by being consistent in what we use for headings across all our library catalogs, we are able to ensure that a patron can find everything we have by a particular author or with a specific title and so on, no matter which library catalog the patron might be searching.

Subject headings are a special type of heading, and AACR2 does not cover them. To make consistent terminology possible for subject headings we use standardized lists of valid headings, referred to as **controlled vocabularies** and **thesauri**.

Most libraries now use LCSH (**Library of Congress Subject Headings**) as their source of subject headings. The following are some examples of LC subject headings (*Library of Congress Subject Headings* 2001).

Airplanes  
 Education—Great Britain—Colonies  
 Birthday cakes  
 Labor laws and legislation  
 World War, 1939–1945

Some smaller public and school libraries use the **Sears List of Subject Headings** instead of LCSH, but as we continue to strive for consistency across library catalogs, even small libraries are switching to LCSH. Some libraries supplement LCSH with other subject schemes, such as MeSH (**Medical Subject Headings** from the National Library of Medicine), LC's **Annotated Card Program Subject Headings**, **Canadian Subject Headings**, or the **Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama, Etc.** (gsafd). Libraries with special collections often rely on a specialized thesaurus to give more detailed subject access to their materials.

Some catalogers create their own local subject headings when no existing scheme gives them the terms they need. This is perfectly permissible, as long as the catalogers indicate that those headings are local, and follow the general rules in the **Subject Cataloging Manual** for creating those headings (*Subject Cataloging Manual* 2000). We will learn how to indicate the sources used for subject headings in chapter 9.

After assigning subject headings, we then have to *classify* the material. We use **classification systems**, such as **Dewey Decimal Classification—DDC** (Dewey 1996) or **Library of Congress Classification—LCC** (*LC Classification Schedules*) to create the call numbers that we put on library materials. The purpose of this classification process is to group similar materials together on the shelves. Most academic libraries tend to use LCC, most public and school libraries tend to use DDC, and there are libraries, especially outside North America, that use other schemes, such as the **Universal Decimal Classification** (UDC).

Why do we have to follow so many complicated rules and schemes? Not everyone likes these rules, and they are admittedly rather complex and take some practice to learn. In fact, in the old days, some catalogers simply made up their own rules, since no one outside their own libraries would ever know or care. But that was in the old days.

The fact is that libraries are no longer islands unto themselves, and now that we have opened our collections to the outside world via the Internet, it is even more important than ever that we follow the rules. *It is especially imperative that we be consistent in our MARC records—the “carriers” of our bibliographic information.*

Why do we need to be so consistent? Here are two good reasons:

1. *MARC allows us to share records.* Before we had MARC records, it was difficult and time-consuming to use copy cataloging from other sources. Now that we have MARC records we no longer have to create all our records from scratch. If catalogers all follow the same rules and standards when they make records, then they can use each other's records. This is important because creating and maintaining the library database are the largest library expense after the collection itself.
2. *MARC allows us to share resources.* Before we had MARC records it was difficult and time-consuming to borrow materials from other libraries. Now that we have MARC records, we can easily find out what materials other libraries own and request that those materials be sent to us for the use of our patrons. **Union catalogs** (like OCLC) represent the collections of thousands of different libraries in one huge database; patrons can search OCLC and then request materials from any of the libraries represented in the database. **Virtual union catalogs** perform the same function by linking the databases of different libraries online, and patrons can request mate-

rials from any of the libraries represented in the linked databases. If we do not use the MARC format for our computer records, we will not be able to add them to a union database, virtual or otherwise. However, if we make our records MARC and follow the same cataloging rules for the data in the records, then our records can be combined with other MARC records in other databases.

The bottom line is that we follow rules because they help our patrons. So we use AACR2 (and the other rules that we mentioned earlier) to tell us what bibliographic information to provide. Then we turn to the MARC standards to tell us how to code this bibliographic information into the computer. For example, as illustrated in figure 2-1, chapter 2 of AACR2 tells us what information we need to provide to describe a book, then MARC tells us how to code that information:

**Fig. 2-1 ■ From Rules to MARC**

Cataloging Rules		MARC
2.1	Title and statement of responsibility area	245
2.2	Edition area	250
2.2	Material specific designation area (N/A)	
2.4	Imprint area	260
2.5	Physical description area	300
2.6	Series area	4XX
2.7	Notes area	5XX

It is, of course, possible to make MARC records without knowing AACR2 or any of the other cataloging rules, but whether these records will be of use to anyone beyond the confines of one's own library is another matter. Such records will not mesh seamlessly with the records from other libraries. This will make it difficult for patrons to determine if the materials represented by different records are the same or truly different, which will make it that much more difficult for patrons to find what they need.

It is also possible to follow the cataloging rules and provide bibliographic information in a machine-readable **format** other than MARC. But then we would be unable to share these records with other libraries, and, thus, we would be unable to share our resources. And if a new machine-readable format is ever selected to take the place of MARC, the same general principles will still apply—the new format will need to become a standard that all libraries can follow, so that we can continue to share our data and our resources. There's just no getting away from rules and standards in this line of work.

**QUIZ 2**

1. What are the six main “areas of information” that we provide for patrons when we describe material?

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2. What are these “areas of information” called?

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3. Why do we need to make our descriptions so detailed and accurate?

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4. What four types of information do we provide so that patrons can search by them?

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5. What is this searchable information called?

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6. What do we call the process of “establishing” headings and providing “cross-references”?

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7. AACR2 tells us what \_\_\_\_\_ to provide, then  
MARC tells us how to \_\_\_\_\_ that information for a  
\_\_\_\_\_.

8. Why do we need all these rules and standards?

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**Note**

1. So you say to yourself, “I think I’ll establish this thing’s name as a ‘bomb.’ But just in case someone is thinking of it as an ‘incendiary device,’ I’ll create a **cross-reference** that leads from the heading that I didn’t use to the one that I did use.” This concept of establishing headings (always using the same name or term to refer to the same person or thing) and providing cross-references from variant forms is, in a nutshell, called **authority work**.